RECENT TRENDS IN OUTDOOR RECREATION PARTICIPATION BY BRITISH COLUMBIANS

A SUMMARY

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SUMMARY

BC Parks is one of the major suppliers of outdoor recreation opportunities in British Columbia. A key indicator of the need for these recreation opportunities is the number of British Columbians who participate in these activities. To help identify recreation participation levels among British Columbians, BC Parks has conducted three province-wide telephone surveys with adult British Columbians over the past few years (1983, 1989, 1991).*

This report presents recent outdoor recreation participation trends by British Columbians. More detailed tabulations are available from the Research Section of BC Parks.

IMPORTANCE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

Outdoor recreation continues to be important to British Columbians. The percent of respondents who said **outdoor recreation was very important to them grew from about 50 percent in 1983 to 56 percent in 1991**. The reasons for this increase are not known, but two possible factors may have contributed to the increase in importance of outdoor recreation. One factor may have been the increasing emphasis on physical health and a greater public recognition of the beneficial role that regular exercise or outdoor recreation participation (e.g. jogging, walking, golf, etc.) can play in staying healthy. Another factor may have been the increasing public awareness about the amount of parkland set aside for conservation and outdoor recreation purposes (ie. the public involvement process of Parks and Wilderness for the '90's.).

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* The 1983 telephone survey was conducted with 1,003 adult British Columbians during January and February, 1983 by Horizon Research. This survey contained questions primarily related to outdoor recreation participation and provincial park issues. The margin of error for a sample 1,000 is about +/- 3 percent.

The 1989 telephone survey, part of an omnibus survey, was conducted with 512 adult British Columbians from April 11th to April 18th, 1989 by Marktrend Research Inc. The margin of error for a sample of about 500 is about +/- 4.4 percent.

The 1991 telephone survey, part of an omnibus survey, was conducted with 508 adult British Columbians from May 6th to May 16th, 1991 by Marktrend Research Inc. The margin of error for a sample of about 500 is about +/- 4.4 percent.

PARTICIPATION IN RECREATION ACTIVITIES

Shifts. Out of a total 14 outdoor recreation activities that respondents were asked whether they had participated in over the past 12 months, 6 activities were comparable from the 1983, 1989 and 1991 surveys. Changes in participation levels occurred in 3 activities. The most notable change occurred in **downhill skiing**. Participation levels in downhill skiing increased from **22 percent in 1983 to 30 percent in 1989 and then dropped back to 23 percent in 1991**. A factor which may have influenced this roller-coaster pattern in the participation levels of downhill skiing by British Columbians is changes in the BC economy. Economic recessions in British Columbia occurred in 1982/83 and in 1990/1991 which coincides with lower participation levels in downhill skiing in 1983 and 1989, while strong economic growth in British Columbia occurred in 1989 which coincides with the higher participation level in downhill skiing in 1989. Usually, downhill skiing is viewed as an expensive activity. Thus, the recent trend in downhill skiing participation by British Columbians may have been influenced by recent shifts in the B.C. economy.

Another change occurred in **overnight backpacking**. While the participation level for overnight backpacking was quite flat between **1983 (21%)** and **1989 (20%), it dropped to 17 percent in 1991.**[**] One factor which may have affected this drop is the "aging" phenomenon that is occurring in British Columbia. Usually, participation in overnight backpacking is much lower among older people than among younger people. In the 1991 survey, for example, the particpation level in overnight backpacking for those 55 years and older was much lower (2%) than those in the age group between 35-44 years (18%) and those in the age group between 18-34 years (26%). Thus, the recent drop in the participation

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[**] A similar downward trend recently occurred in the use of 17 major wilderness areas in U.S. national parks. Visitation in these wilderness areas fell from about 1.1 million overnight stays in 1976 to 758,000 overnight stays in 1986 -- a decrease of 31 percent. Even though the time reference and unit of measure is different in this study, it does suggest that the popularity of overnight backpacking seems to be declining. For a more detailed discussion about this study, please see R.C. Lucas and G.H. Stankey. "Shifting trends in wilderness recreation use". In Watson, Alan E. comp. Outdoor Recreation Benchmark 1988: Proceedings of the national outdoor recreation forum; 1988, January 13-14; Tampa, Fl. Gen Tech. Rep. SE-52. Asheville, NC: USDA, Forest Service, Southeastern Forest Experiment Station: 357-367.

of overnight backpacking may have been influenced by an "aging" B.C. population.

The third change occurred in **day hiking.** Participation in day hiking increased from **49 percent in 1983 to 56 percent in 1989. In 1991, it flattened out at 54 percent.** A possible reason for this upward shift may be an increasing desire for physical exercise in an outdoor setting. At the same time, many British Columbians may not be looking to participate in recreation activities that are too physically strenuous or demanding (e.g.overnight backpacking).

Two other shifts were found when the other 8 activities were compared for the latter two years (1989, 1991). **Outdoor swimming decreased by 6 percent** (from 67% in 1989 to 61% in 1991) and **sailing went down by 4 percent** (from 13% in 1989 to 9% in 1991). The reasons for the decline in outdoor swimming are not known, but the decline in sailing, like downhill skiing, may have been influenced by the 1991 economic recession in British Columbia.

Popularity. The rankings of the five most popular activities did not change between 1989 and 1991. These activities were:

Rank		1991 percent participating	1989
1	Going to the beach	79	80
2	Outdoor swimming	61	67
3	Day hiking	55	56
4	Camping trip	52	49
5	Fishing	46	48

PARTICIPATION BY DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (1991)

For the **1991 survey**, comparisons in participation levels for 14 recreation activities were also made for three demographic characteristics: location of residence, gender and age groups.

Location of residence. The participation level for **going to the beach** (see table below) was **slightly higher** among residents living in the **Greater Vancouver area**[***] than among residents living outside this area. At the same time participation levels in **fishing, powerboating, hunting and snowmobiling** were **significantly higher** among residents living **outside the Greater Vancouver** area than residents living in this area. For the other 9 activities, participation levels were quite similar.

	Inside GVRD	Outside GVRD
Going to the beach	82%	75%
Fishing	37%	54%
Powerboating	21%	35%
Hunting	5%	22%
Snowmobiling	6%	16%

Gender. Participation levels were similar between males and females for nine of the 14 activities. **For five activities, however, participation levels were significantly higher among males** than among females. These activities were:

	Males	Females
Day Hiking	60%	51%
Fishing	56%	36%
Powerboating	35%	21%
Overnight Backpacking	21%	14%
Hunting	21%	7%

Age Groups. Participation levels were compared for three age groups: 18-34 years, 35-54 years and 55 years and older. When the first two age groups (18-34 years and 35-54 years) were compared, participation levels were similar for most activities. There were, however, several exceptions. **Participation levels tended to be higher for the younger age group (18-34 years) for the following activities: overnight backpacking, day hiking,**

[***] The Greater Vancouver Regional District includes: Vancouver, North Shore, Burnaby/New Westminster/Maple Ridge, Richmond/Delta, and Surrey/White Rock/Langley.

downhill skiing, outdoor swimming and snowmobiling (see table below).

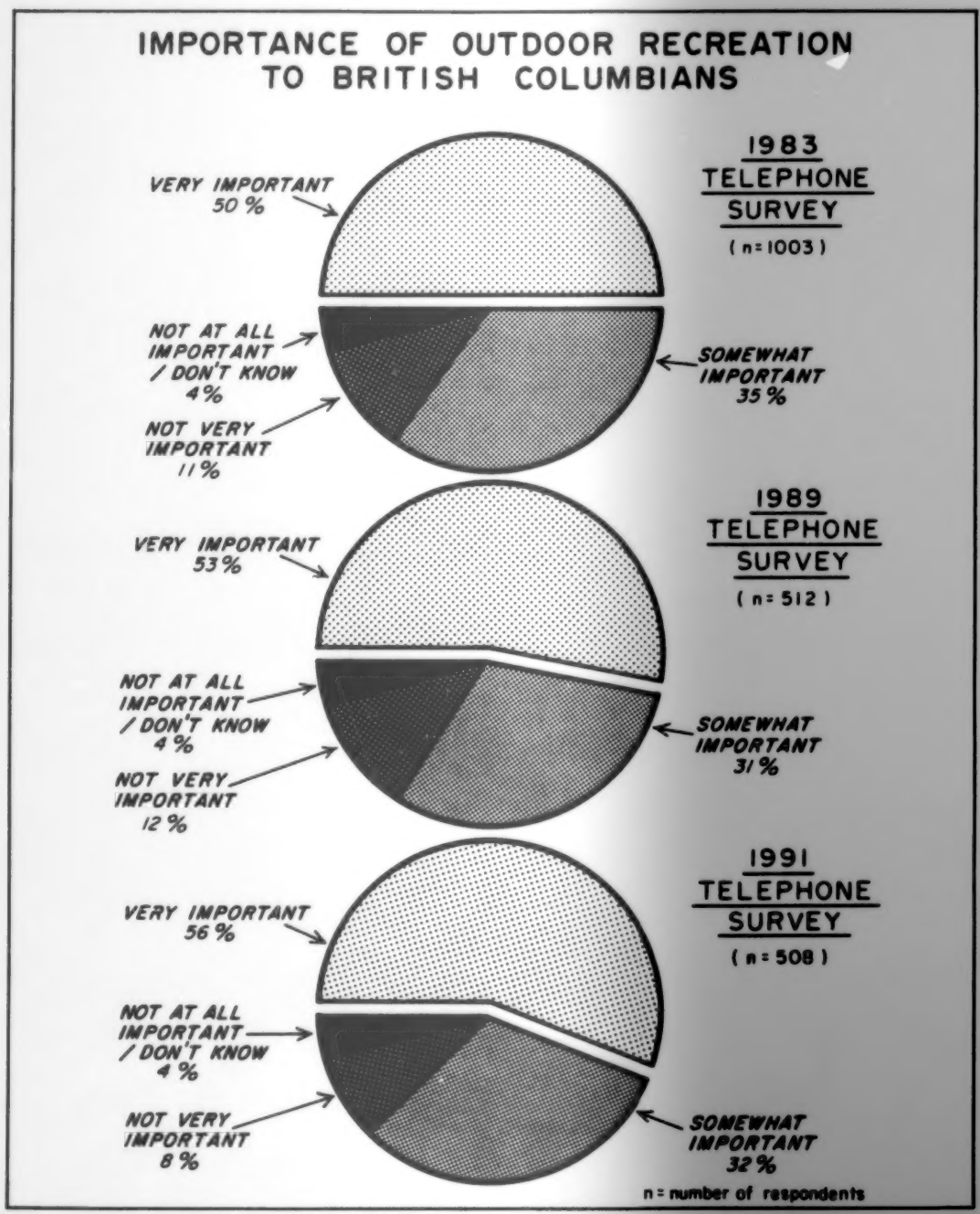
When the first two age groups were compared with the older age group (55 years and older), participation levels were higher for nearly all activities except two activities (sailing, kayaking) which had similar participation levels. It was also found that the participation level for snowmobiling tended to much higher among the younger age group(18-34 years) than among the other two age groups (35-54 years and 55 years and older). **In general, participation levels tended to be higher for younger people than for older people for nearly all activities.**

	Age Groups		
	18-34 years	35-54 years	55+ years
	in percent		
Going to the beach	88	80	62
Outdoor swimming	74	65	33
Day hiking	69	59	27
Camping trip	59	59	28
Fishing	52	50	29
Downhill skiing	36	24	3
Power boating	36	29	12
Overnight backpacking	27	18	2
Canoeing	24	18	4
Cross-country skiing	21	16	7
Hunting	16	16	7
Sailing	11	9	4
Snowmobiling	19	8	6
Kayaking	3	3	0

Note: Significant difference indicated between darker print and lighter print.

FINDINGS

1. Outdoor recreation continues to be important to British Columbians. The number of British Columbians who said outdoor recreation was "very important" to them went up from 50 percent in 1983 to 56 percent in 1991.[****]

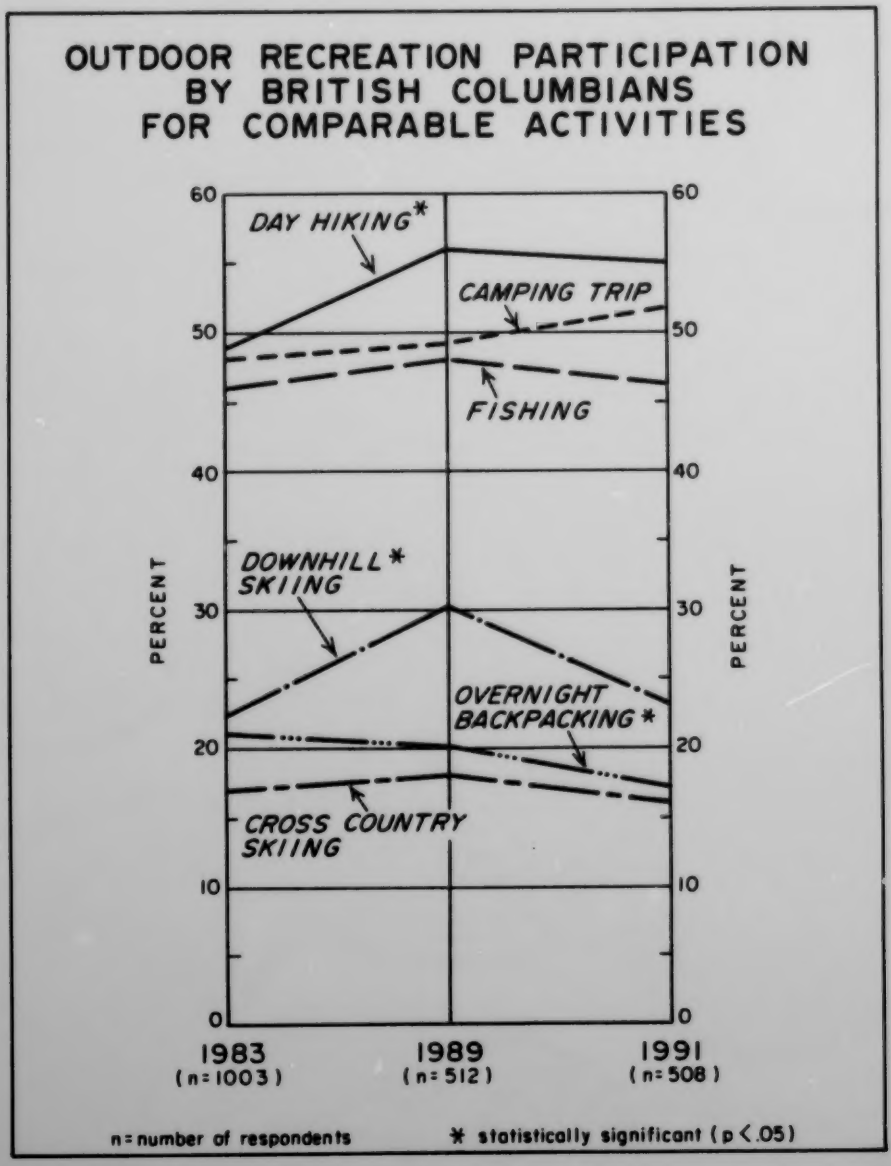

IMPORTANCE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION TO BRITISH COLUMBIANS
1983 TELEPHONE SURVEY
(n=1003)
VERY IMPORTANT 50 %
NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT / DON'T KNOW 4 %
NOT VERY IMPORTANT 11 %
SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT 35 %
1989 TELEPHONE SURVEY
(n=512)
VERY IMPORTANT 53 %
NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT / DON'T KNOW 4 %
NOT VERY IMPORTANT 12 %
SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT 31 %
1991 TELEPHONE SURVEY
(n=508)
VERY IMPORTANT 56 %
NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT / DON'T KNOW 4 %
NOT VERY IMPORTANT 8 %
SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT 32 %
n = number of respondents

[****] The question in the 1983 telephone survey and the 1989 and 1991 omnibus telephone survey was: Generally, how important is outdoor recreation to you compared to your other interests... is it... (The response alternatives were: NOT AT ALL IMPORTANT, NOT VERY IMPORTANT, SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT, or VERY IMPORTANT.)

2. The number of people who went **day hiking** increased from 49 percent in 1983 to 54% in 1989.

The number of people who went **downhill skiing** in 1989 (30 %) was considerably higher than in 1983 (22%) and 1991 (23%).

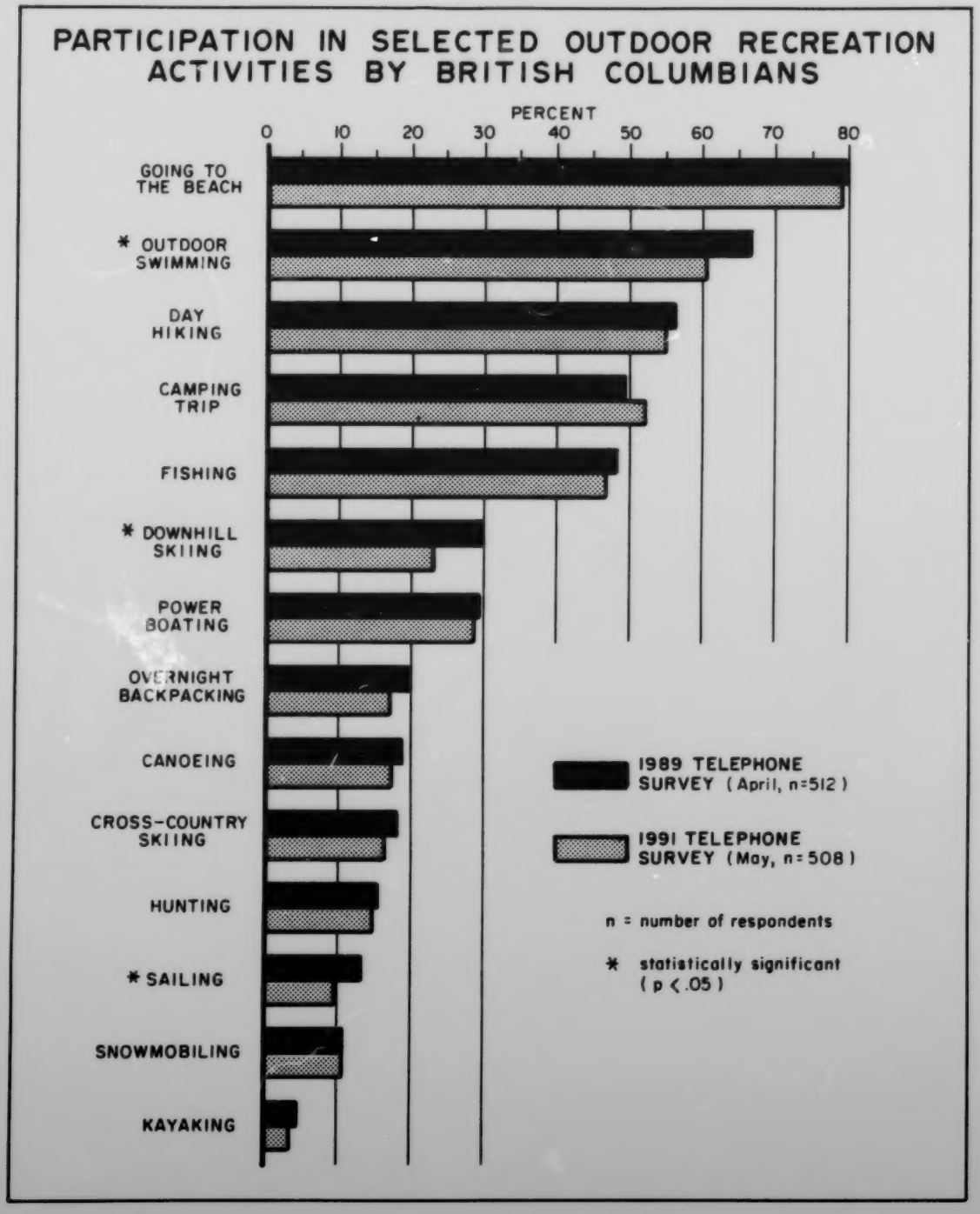
The number of people who went **overnight backpacking** has declined from 1983 (21%) to 1991 (17%).*****



***** The question in the 1983 survey was: During the past 12 months, did you participate in any of the following types of recreation activities?

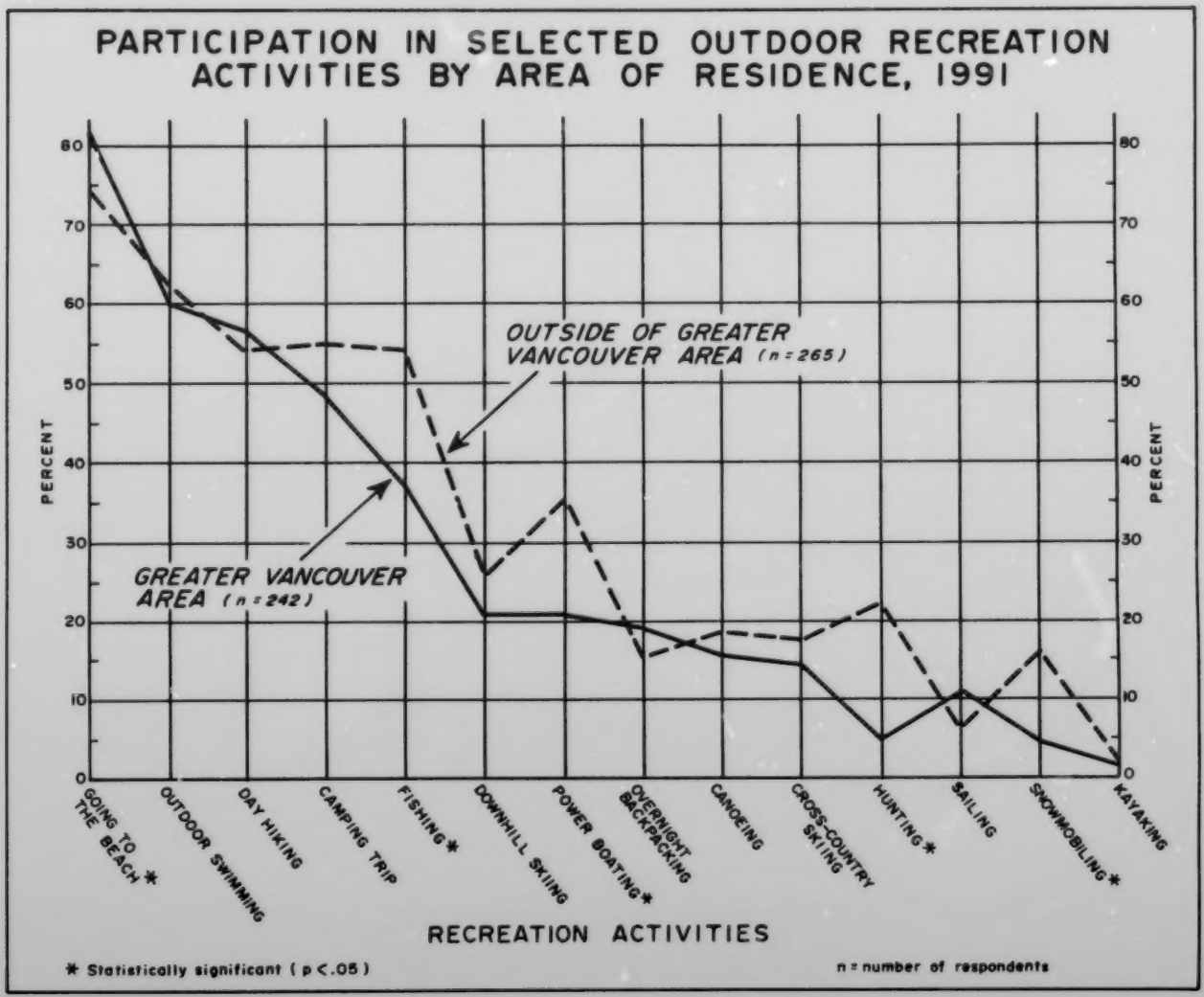
The question in the 1989 and 1991 omnibus telephone surveys was: In the past 12 months, in which of the following types of outdoor recreation activities have you participated?

3. Between 1989 and 1991, participation in three outdoor recreation activities declined: **downhill skiing (down 7%** -- from 30% to 23%); **outdoor swimming (down 6%** -- from 67% to 61%); and **sailing (down 4%** -- from 13% to 9%).

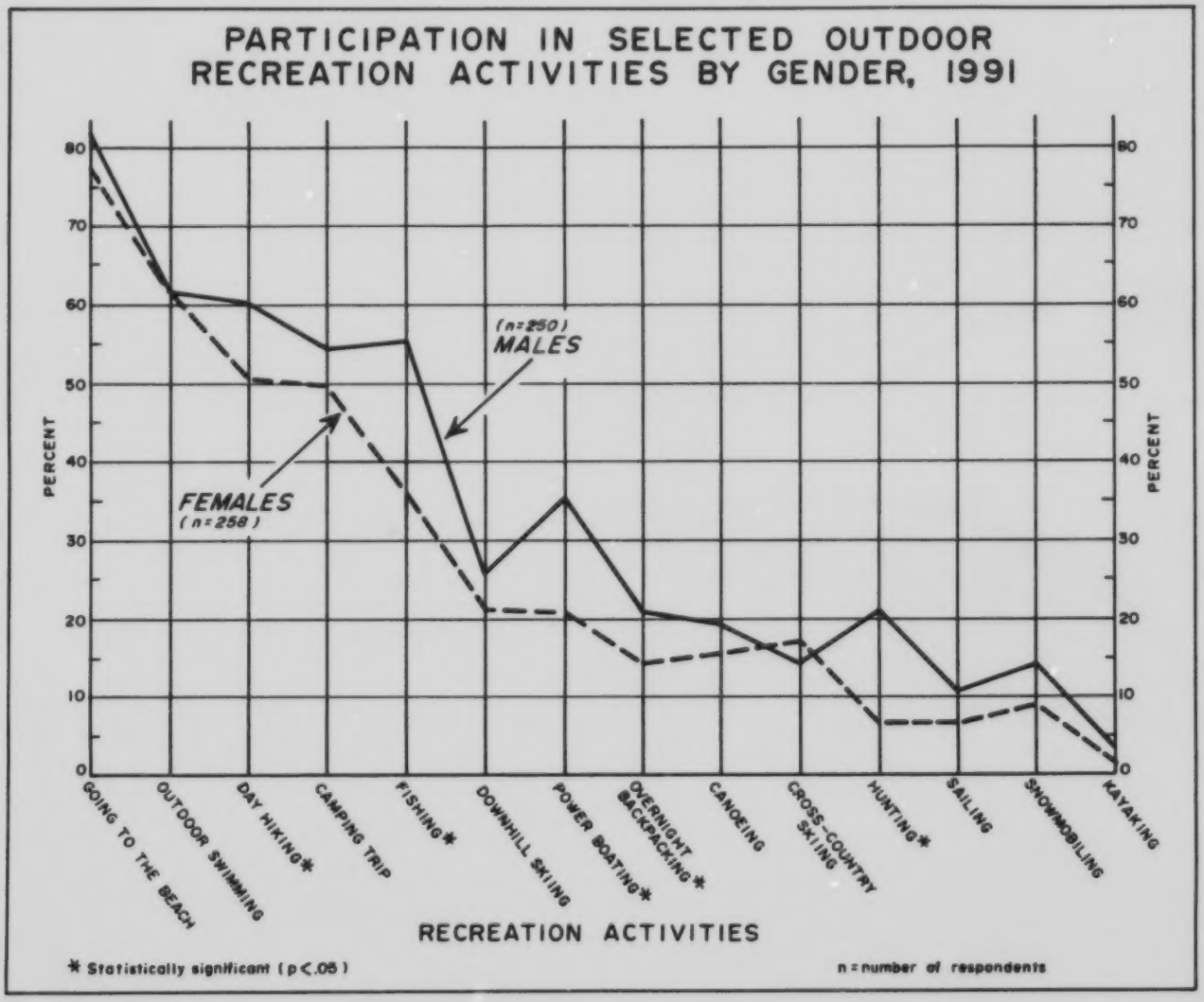


4. Participation in outdoor recreation activities was significantly higher by residents living outside the Greater Vancouver for four activities: fishing (54% vs 37%), powerboating (35% vs 21%), hunting (22% vs 5%) and snowmobiling (16% vs 6%).

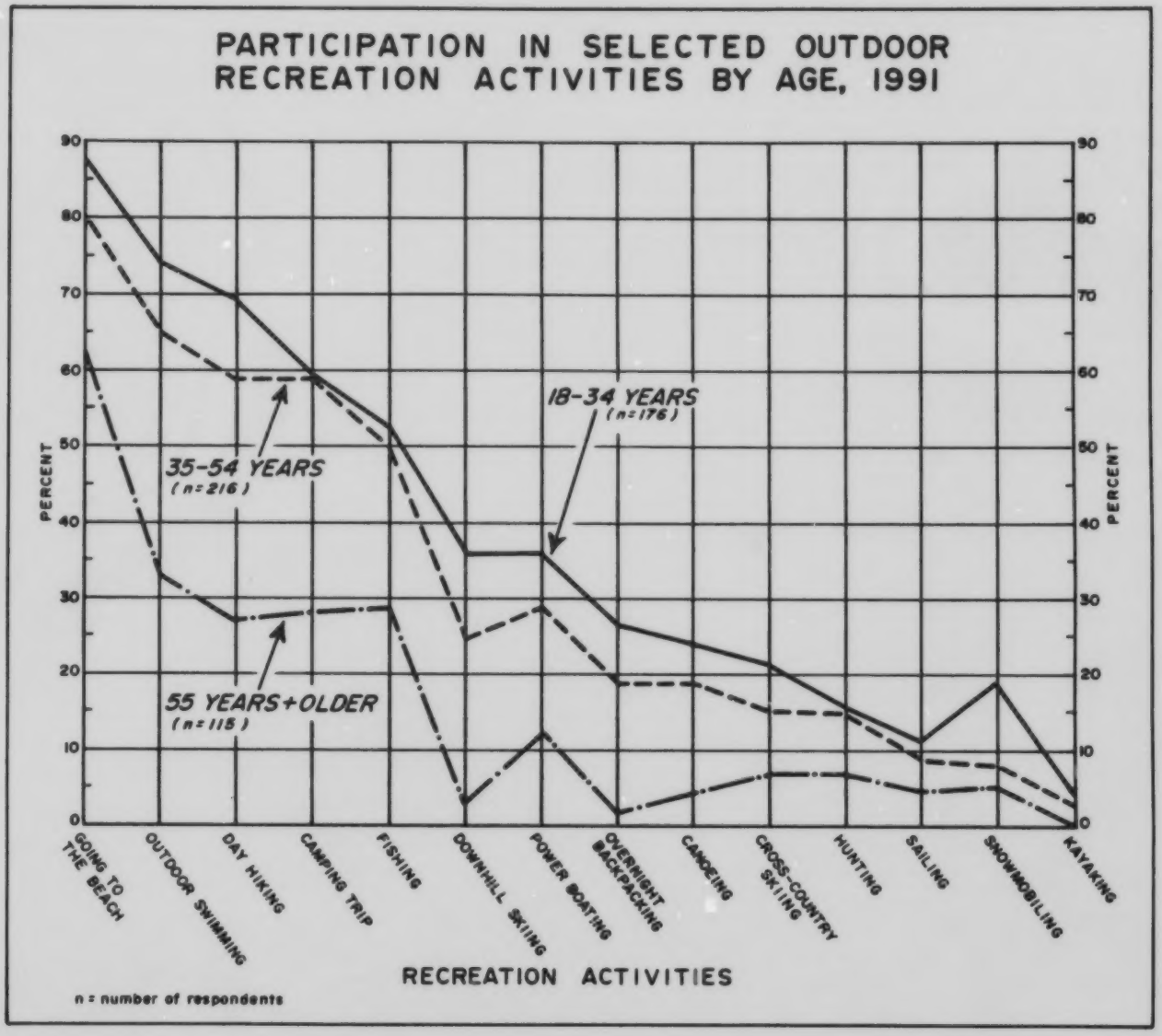
   At the same time, participation levels for going to the beach tended to be higher among Greater Vancouver residents (82%) than among residences living outside the Greater Vancouver area (75%).



5. Participation levels in five outdoor recreation activities was significantly higher among males than among females: day hiking (respectively 60% vs 51%), fishing (56% vs 36%), powerboating (35% vs 21%), overnight hiking (21% vs 14%) and hunting (21% vs 7%).



6. In general, participation levels in most activities (except sailing and kayaking) tended to be higher for younger people than for older people.



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